

NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Knowing of, Understanding, and Keeping the Commandments of God

By Elder Daniel G. Hamilton

Area Seventy, Pacific



Elder Daniel G.
Hamilton

It is one thing to *know* of the commandments. It is another thing to *understand* the commandments. It is yet another to *willingly keep* the commandments.

As a new convert to the Church at age thirteen, I came to *know* of the commandments. However, I did not *understand* the reason for some of the Lord's commandments, nor did I think I could see the blessings of keeping them. For example, having faithfully kept the Word of Wisdom for a time, I found that my strength and stamina in playing sport was no better, and in some cases, far worse, than that of my teammates who disobeyed every facet of the Word of Wisdom. They seemed to be the ones who could “run and not be weary,”¹ not me. However, in faith I continued to obey.

Furthermore, it seemed to me that the commandments were hemming me in and cramping my style. Now, however, some 48 years later I view the commandments as liberating, not confining. What changed? Certainly not the commandments. It is my understanding and attitude that have changed.

I now view the commandments as I view the “swim between the flags” signs at the beach—with appreciation. To freely enjoy a swim at the beach, in an area which has been predetermined as safe, I choose to swim between the flags. Of course, I can choose to swim elsewhere, but in so doing I must accept the consequences of that decision.

I now choose to keep the commandments because I find great peace and safety in doing so, and with the

passage of time, I have seen the blessings of obeying them.

Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, speaking of the commandments, noted: “God’s plan includes directions for us, referred to in the scriptures as commandments. These commandments are neither a whimsical set nor an arbitrary collection of imposed rules meant only to train us to be obedient. They are linked to our developing the



True discipleship is about coming to understand the commandments and then willingly keeping them, because we have come to know that they are a blessing from our loving Father in Heaven.

attributes of godliness, returning to our Heavenly Father, and receiving enduring joy. ... Though God wants us to be on the covenant path, He gives us the dignity of choosing.”²

Like Nephi, for my sake, I know “I must obey.”³

Joy, happiness, deep satisfaction, a sense of security and divine purpose come, in time, to those who understand and keep the commandments. In fact, it is as we in faith keep the commandments that we come to understand them. John quotes the Lord as saying, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”⁴

Edgar A. Guest penned these words capturing the virtue of doing as opposed to just talking:

*I'd rather see a sermon than to hear
one any day,*

*I'd rather one should walk with me
than merely tell the way.*

*The eye's a better pupil, more will-
ing than the ear,*

*Fine counsel is confusing, but
example's always clear,*

*And the best of all the preachers are
the men who live their creeds,*

*For to see a good put in action is
what everybody needs.*

*I can soon learn how to do it if you
will let me see it done,*

*I can watch your hands in action,
but your tongue too fast may run.*

*And the lectures you deliver may be
very wise and true,*

*But I'd rather get my lessons by
observing what you do;*

*For I may misunderstand you and
the high advice you give.*

*But there is no misunderstanding
how you act and how you live.⁵*

Discipleship is not about just knowing of the commandments in an academic way and not living them. Discipleship is not about blindly keeping the commandments. True discipleship is about coming to *understand* the commandments and then *willingly keeping* them, because we have come to know that they are a blessing from our loving Father in Heaven. ■

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 89:20.
2. Dale G. Renlund, “Choose You This Day,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 105.
3. 2 Nephi 33:15.
4. John 7:17; emphasis added.
5. Edgar A. Guest, “Sermons We See,” *Liahona: The Elders' Journal*, Oct. 25, 1921, 174.

LOCAL PAGES

Twelve-Year-Old Twins Send Books to Tonga

By Crystal Viljoen

When twelve-year-old twin sisters Lesieli and Anitimoni Ahokava went to Tonga for the first time for their grandmother's funeral, they were surprised to see how many children did not attend school.

“It was sad to see so many kids, including members of our own family,

missing out on an education,” Lesieli said, “because I know how important it is!”

They returned from Tonga talking about what they'd seen and learned from their older sister Tracy, that there was a shortage of books in Tonga and there wasn't even a public library. The

girls were determined to do something about this situation.

“Everyone has a purpose in life,” said Anitimoni. “Education can help you know what your purpose is and [how to] achieve it.”

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The twins made up their minds to collect as many books as they could and send them to Tonga.

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and send them to Tonga. They made posters and displayed them all over the neighbourhood and in the church. They took boxes into schools looking for donations, reached out to friends and family on Facebook and went into their local public libraries asking for any surplus books.

"It took a while for people to actually give us anything," Lesieli said, "but we just kept going until it started taking off."

At last the girls had a load of books to donate, but they needed money to send it to Tonga.

"Our sister suggested we busk for the money," said Anitimoni, who plays the flute.

For Lesieli, who plays the violin, this would be her first public performance and she was scared!

"We practised a lot so that we would get a lot of money," Lesieli said,

"but I was still scared when I got there. The more I played, the more comfortable and confident I became. I felt so accomplished afterwards."

Once the girls had the money they needed for shipping costs, they sent the books to a family friend in Tonga who worked at the Liahona High School. She distributed the books to five different schools: Havelu gps, Fua'amotu gps, Ocean of Light School, Mangaia Primary School and Liahona High School.

"I felt happy and so proud of myself for doing this service for others," Lesieli said.

"I have felt the Spirit with me as we collected the books," said Anitimoni. "Doing this service has brought me so much joy."

With their family and friends actively supporting their efforts, the girls are already gathering another load of books to send to Tonga.

"I feel like I have more love for the people of Tonga," older sister Ofa commented. "I don't see the individuals who receive the books we send, but I know that Heavenly Father loves them and has inspired us to do this." ■



TESSA DEWSBURY



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Personal Finances Self-Reliance Course

By Crystal Viljoen

When Nepote Hingano began the Personal Finances for Self-Reliance course, he hoped to improve his family's ability to budget and save. He did not expect to lose more than 20 kilograms and to improve his relationship with his wife.

"It's not just another program," he said. "It's a way of life. It's the way the Lord would like us to live and it will affect more than just your budget."

After a lot of talk as the stake high councillor overseeing self-reliance, Nepote finally attended a personal finances class and was immediately hooked.

"I knew our family needed it," he said. "We were just getting by as it was."

Driven by the desire to set an example in his calling and in his home, Nepote and his wife, Masina, implemented the principles of the course, starting with tracking expenses. The effects went well beyond what they expected.

"A lot of our overspending was on junk food and takeaways," Masina said. "Fifteen dollars for a pizza doesn't seem like much, but it all adds up

through the week. Having to see it on paper was a big eye-opener."

Nepote was 160kg when he started the course. He has lost over 20kg so far, just by cutting down on unnecessary junk food spending.

In addition to physical and financial improvements, the Hingano family felt an increase in spiritual strength as they discovered the journey to temporal self-reliance is, above all, a spiritual one.

"The My Foundation lessons helped me to know spiritually that this [course] will work if we have faith and put our trust in it."

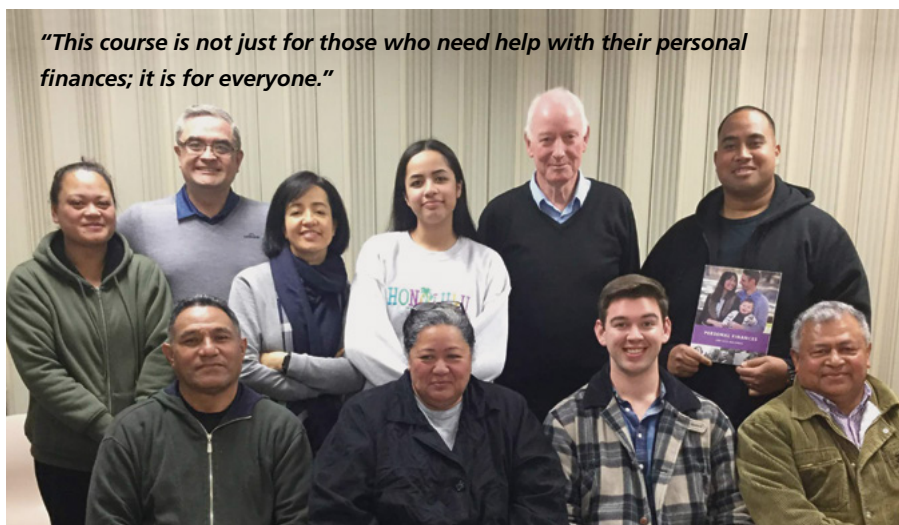
As the couple exercised the faith required to put into practise the things they learned during classes, they

felt their relationship with the Lord strengthen, as well as their relationship with each other.

"As part of the program we learned to be action partners," Nepote said. "We would keep track of each other and check in spending and financial things. Now I feel like we are eternal action partners. We check in not just for financial things but for everything in life. It's helped us grow closer as a couple because we are communicating a lot more."

By applying the principles of the personal finance course, the Hinganos and their five children have managed to put aside a month's worth of savings as well as enough money for a family holiday with no need to take out a loan.

"This is new to us," Nepote said. "We've never had this much money saved before, and it wasn't because



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of a pay rise or a second job. It was just by applying the principles from the course.”

The course seemed to come just in time too, because Nepote’s father passed away not long after Nepote completed it. Being from a Pacific

Island family, the Hinganos faced the pressure to have a big funeral and incur all the expenses that go with that. Using the principles learnt in the course, they were able to manage family expectations and keep the funeral costs within their budget.

The Hinganos encourage anyone looking for help to take the course. “You both need to be on board for it to work,” Masina said, “but it’s so worth it. This course is not just for those who need help with their personal finances. It is for everyone.” ■

Eat Healthy and Be Active: An Inspired Programme

By Crystal Viljoen

The Eat Healthy and Be Active programme (EHBA) is spreading throughout the Church in the Pacific. Now, with diabetes as the key humanitarian focus, the Church has already donated a phenomenal amount of time, money and resources in the way of support and treatment for people with diabetes and associated complications arising from the disease. However, the extent of the effects of this disease in the Pacific and the tragedy of late interventions leading to amputations and deaths have inspired Hans Sorensen, Pacific Area welfare manager, to shift more of the emphasis to education and prevention.

“In 2014, no one in our strategy meeting came from a medical background, but still we settled on diabetes as our chief humanitarian focus,” Hans said. “The Area had not taken on a task of this magnitude before, and we had no history to follow. I

believe it was inspiration that led us down this path.”

The humanitarian team had to learn all they could about diabetes and try to understand what was happening in the Pacific. Diabetes is a worldwide problem, but in poorer economies—and with Polynesians, Melanesians and Micronesians having a higher predisposition to the disease—it is more likely to be fatal.

After the team met with Ministers of Health, doctors, specialists, nurses and other nongovernmental organizations, it was clear to them that diabetes was getting out of hand. A prevention intervention was desperately needed.

In 2016 the Eat Healthy and Be Active programme was born. Extensive research was done.

Focus groups were held across the Church in the Pacific, and the findings were analysed by a professor at BYU.

A prevention manual was written with a Pacific look and feel, which brought together the doctrine of the Word of Wisdom, words of Church leaders and medical science. The programme gives participants information necessary to make informed choices regarding food and physical activity to reduce the risk of diabetes, while tracking personal progress over the 12-week course.

With great success with the pilot programme and a few amendments to the manual, EHBA was officially launched in August 2018. Around 40 stakes across the area picked up the programme immediately and have seen amazing results.

Jessica Paea, from Titahi Bay in Porirua, was led to the programme after realising that getting healthy would continue to be a struggle until she included Heavenly Father in her journey.

“It seemed silly asking for the Lord’s help with eating habits,” she said, “but I

My children are learning from a young age there are better, healthier options.

Before I started the programme, simple tasks had become difficult.



As soon as I asked the Lord for help, doors began to open for me.



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knew that my diet would have serious long-term effects if I continued this way. As soon as I asked the Lord for help, doors began to open for me.”

At a workout class one day, Jessica happened to meet the Eat Healthy and Be Active facilitator, who told her about the course.

“That same week, my father-in-law happened to visit us on his way to a class, which he himself was attending,” she said. “He invited me to go along, so I did. The spirit I felt in that first meeting was undeniable. We met in a church building, began with a prayer and read quotes from Church leaders and the scriptures. The spiritual and doctrinal aspects of the manual enriched the practical and nutritional content, and really helps me have the strength I need to stay on this path.”

Satisfied this programme would indeed include the Lord in her journey, Jessica implemented the principles taught and experienced instant results.

“Before I started the programme, simple tasks had become difficult. I had low energy levels and was uncomfortable in my own skin. Faithfully following the programme, I saw results not only on the scales but also in the way I felt every day. I found that as I ate right, my body stopped craving that sugar fix,” said Jessica.

With support from the programme facilitator, the healthy recipe ideas shared on the EHBA Facebook group, and the understanding and insight gained from the manual, Jessica has also improved the eating habits in her home.

“The programme helped me put the health and well-being of my family and I first” she said. “I plan our meals and snacks and shop accordingly, so we have less temptation in the home. My children are learning from a young age there are better, healthier options, for example: instead of having sugar on their

breakfast they have fruit and Greek yoghurt, which they have discovered they really like. This programme has been a great blessing for our family.”

This inspired programme has caught the attention of many health professionals both inside and outside of the Church.

Hans Sorenson said, “I had a GP [General Practitioner] ask if she could have the manuals for her waiting room; and every time I’ve shared the manual with Ministry of Health officials across the Pacific, they’ve all wanted a copy.

“One medical NGO has taken our manual, adapted it for a secular audience and is training other churches in Tonga to use it. A team of Seventh-day Adventist medical doctors in Fiji want to use the manual despite the fact they have their own health improvement programme that has been running for 30 years. The response has been nothing short of miraculous.” ■

TESSA DEWSBURY

EAT HEALTHY AND BE ACTIVE

A Pacific Diabetes Prevention
Education Programme



“I member”: A Story of True Conversion

By Alexandria Craig

It was the end of the lesson before I realised he was deaf. I was a young missionary and had only been in the ward for a month. When my companion and I saw Brother Yao sitting there alone and silent, we just thought he was shy. When we asked him his name, the Gospel Principles teacher finally said, “Sisters, he’s deaf!”

The next class was a combined priesthood and Relief Society lesson on family history. I saw Brother Yao watching the other members as they spoke to each other. I saw in his eyes that he wanted to be a part of it, but because he couldn’t hear or speak, he just sat in the corner on his own.

I sat next to him and wrote on a piece of paper, “Brother, are you okay?”

He said yes. I could tell he was too shy to ask for help, so I continued to write to him.

“They are speaking about family history,” I wrote.

He gave the sign for thank you.

I continued to write to him throughout the lesson so that he could understand what was being discussed. As I did, I saw his shy frown turn into an engaged smile. I wondered how he

would understand what was being taught when I wasn’t there writing everything for him.

“Brother, do you understand the things people are saying when they teach?” I wrote as the lesson ended.

He shook his head.

“But you still come?” I asked.

He took the pen and wrote, “I member,” then pointed to himself.

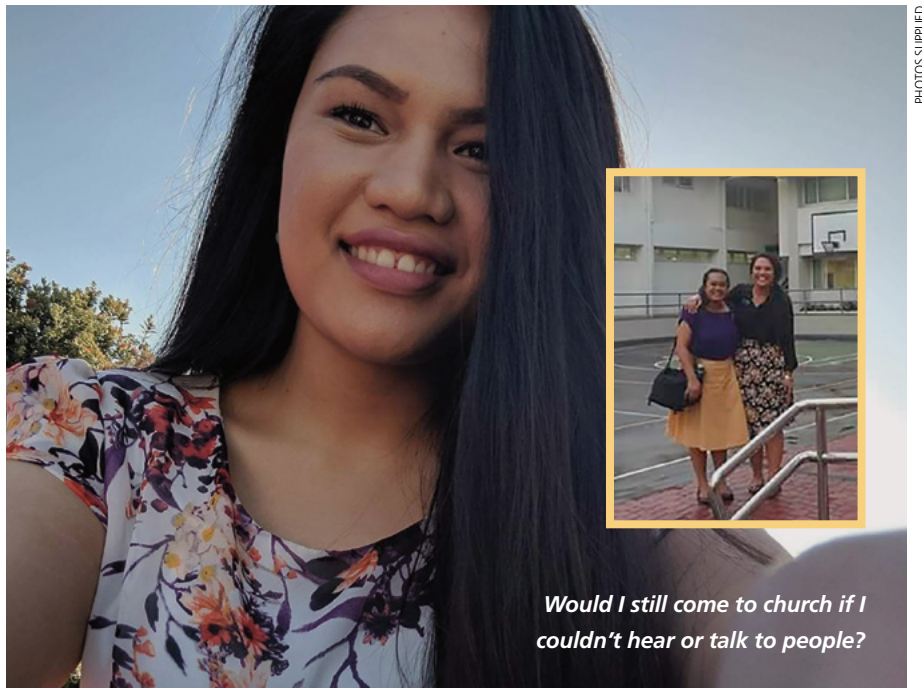
Those two words touched me deeply. This 58-year-old man didn’t have any friends at church because communication was so difficult. He could not get into any of the class discussions or sing the hymns or any of those things that I had always enjoyed at church. He had no family left, as his parents had died and his brothers had moved to Australia and left him behind, and work was hard to come by for a deaf person. So, while he worked very hard at what employment he could find, he was practically homeless. And yet here he was. He attended church whenever he could afford the bus fare. He attended

classes and picked up whatever he could because “I member.”

I questioned my own conversion. Would I still come if I couldn’t hear or talk to people? Would I still come if making friends was this hard? Would I still come if all those things that we take for granted weren’t there?

After church, a few of us missionaries decided to learn as much sign language as we could before our next appointment. We managed to learn the alphabet and many other words in only half an hour. When we saw him later that day, we were actually able to have a decent conversation with him using the sign language we had learnt. He was so happy. There was a light about him as he was finally being understood.

Brother Yao is a great example to me of what it means to be truly converted. I want to be like him. I want to know that no matter how things change or how hard living the gospel might be, church membership will mean as much to me as it did to him and that I will be as loyal to it as he was. ■



Would I still come to church if I couldn't hear or talk to people?